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Orchard Ridge campus scenery protection eyes

By MICHAEL MATUSZEWSKI

Environmentalists and nature lovers will sleep a bit easier if the Oakland Community College Board of Trustees follows through on proposals to write a land-use policy to protect remaining scenic lands on the college's five campuses.

The proposals made at a study session June 2 resulted from the efforts of the Farmington Naturalists Club and the OCC Campus Development Committee to protect two parcels on the college's Orchard Ridge campus in Farmington Hills from consideration as future building sites.

The controversy began when a strip of land along the southern edge of the Orchard Ridge campus, which had been cultivated as a nature area, was being considered as a possible building site. That area was subsequently disregarded when tests revealed a high water table.

ANN RODEWIG, spokeswoman for the Farmington Naturalists Club said, "We wanted to try to get them (OCC trustees) to do something so that it won't happen again."

Bill McNaughton, professor of biology at Orchard Ridge and a member of the Campus Development Committee and the Farmington Naturalists Club, proposed that the board establish a policy which would prohibit the arbitrary consideration of land for building on the Orchard Ridge campus. Later, a general land use policy was suggested as a favorable alternative to a policy referring to any specific sites.

McNaughton and the naturalists originally proposed a policy which would have made the board take an active role in guiding any consideration of lands for construction sites. Also, the board would have to approve the selection of any specific site.

McNaughton said, "We want to prevent architects, for future projects from independently going off and considering these areas."

Trustee David C. Rogers, however, said McNaughton was asking the board to do the impossible. "Please recognize," Rogers said, "that you're asking us to say 'don't ever consider this' when, in reality, there will come a time when, at least, it must be considered."

The board left the door open for several actions. Under consideration is a resolution advising future boards to preserve Orchard Ridge lands.

The board is also considering drafting a broad land-use policy as well as a resolution dealing specifically with the Orchard Ridge lands.

ACTION is expected to be taken at the next general meeting.

McNaughton justified his stand to protect the nature area along the campus' southern edge and a large swampy area forming the school's eastern boundary along Orchard Lake Road, saying, "I think of the woods as having tangible value. To me they have a priceless value."

"It won't be long and there won't be that much of this kind of land left in Oakland County."

"This will be an oasis for people to get away from the Southfield and Livonia type of mall," he predicted. "I feel very strongly that there should be a policy. I'd sleep better at night if there were."

TRUSTEE David W. Hackett emerged as one of McNaughton's strongest supporters. "I would put these lands off limits forever and ever and ever, and then even a little bit longer," Hackett said.

"We have, in our wisdom or stupidity, ruined this whole planet. I think it's good for the community that this institution owns this land," he said.

"The day when we can no longer get in our car and drive to Houghton Lake or hop on a plane and fly to see the beauty of Ontario is going to come. We've got to start being realistic," he said.

The board as a whole agreed in principle with the stand taken by the Campus Development Committee and the Farmington Naturalists Club. Little trouble is expected in reaching some solution.

Trustee Barbara J. Willing said, "If it were worded properly, I would like to see a policy."

But Richard Thompson, provost of the Orchard Ridge campus, suggested that a general land-use policy might be more practical. Gordon C. Henderson, chairman of the OCC board, supported the idea of a general policy but said a resolution covering just the Orchard Ridge lands should be approved.

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